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# Regime Change and Ethnic Cleavages in Africa

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This article explores a hitherto overlooked consequence of regime change in Africa. It shows how the shift from one-party to multiparty rule in the region altered the kinds of ethnic cleavages that structure political competition and conflict. The article demonstrates how the different strategic logics of political competition in one-party and multiparty settings create incentives for political actors to emphasize different kinds of ethnic identities: local-level identities (usually revolving around tribe or clan) in one-party elections and broader scale identities (usually revolving around region, language, or religion) in multiparty elections. The argument is illustrated with evidence from the 1991 and 1992 regime transitions in Zambia and Kenya.

**Keywords:** *ethnic politics; democratization; Africa; Zambia; Kenya*

Since 1989, roughly 20 African nations have undergone transitions from one-party to multiparty rule.<sup>1</sup> This article explores the effects of this (re-)introduction of competitive multiparty elections on ethnic conflict. In doing so, the article examines an overlooked consequence of regime change. Rather than ask whether the shift to multiparty competition led to a change in the intensity of intergroup violence (e.g., Chua, 2003; Glickman, 1995; Ottaway, 1998; Sisk & Reynolds, 1998; Smith, 2000; Young, 2006), I focus instead on how the transition from one-party to multiparty rule altered the dimension of ethnic cleavage around which political competition—violent or otherwise—takes place. The dependent variable I treat is not the level of conflict but its locus. I explore not whether the shift to multiparty rule has caused more ethnic conflict to occur but whether it has caused ethnic conflict to be carried out in the name of different kinds of identities.

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**Author's Note:** I thank Karen Ferree, Steven Wilkinson, Daniel Young, participants in the Working Group in African Political Economy, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. I also thank Richard Banda, Hilary Mwale, and Charlotte Luanga for their excellent research assistance in Zambia and the late Judy Geist for her help in assembling the data on Kenyan parliamentary candidates. I also gratefully acknowledge financial support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

I present evidence from the regime changes in Zambia and Kenya in 1991 and 1992 to suggest that it has.

The starting point for my analysis is the observation that African political systems possess multiple lines of potentially mobilizable ethnic cleavage. Although ordinarily lumped under the umbrella term *ethnic*, communal identities in Africa take many forms. Sometimes people identify themselves in religious terms. At other times they distinguish themselves from others by language. At still other times, in-group/out-group distinctions are made on the basis of tribal affiliation, clan membership, geographic region of origin, or race.<sup>2</sup> Within a single country, each of these distinctions may serve, in different situations, as potential axes of social differentiation and conflict. Describing the situation in Ghana in the early 1980s, for example, Naomi Chazan (1982) observed that

sometimes ethnic solidarity was expressed in cultural and linguistic terms. At other times ethnicity was presented in regional or geographic terms. At still other points, ethnicity was manifested in local-communal—traditional, political or kin—terms. . . . All possible ethnic-political presentations, either separately or in conjunction, could be brought to bear on the political situation depending on particular conditions. (pp. 467-468)

Chazan's description captures well the multidimensional nature of ethnic solidarities in Africa. But it raises an important question: What "conditions" generate which sorts of "presentations"? When is ethnic politics about religion rather than language? When is it about region rather than tribe? Under what conditions do some bases of ethnic cleavage come to organize politics rather than others?

A vast literature documents the context-dependence of ethnic identities (e.g., Chandra, 2004; Horowitz, 1985; Mitchell, 1956; Young, 1976). Usually, "context" is determined by factors that are fleeting and individualized: who the person happens to be interacting with at the moment, the events or issues of the day, the person's physical location at the time he or she is reflecting on who she or he is. This article shows how the one-party or multiparty nature of the political system can also define a context that affects the kinds of ethnic identities that people use to define themselves—at least for the purposes of electoral competition and voting. I demonstrate that, in certain institutional and demographic contexts (which I will elaborate), political competition in a one-party setting will generate incentives for individuals to identify themselves in terms of ethnic identities that define them as members of small, localized groups. In an African context,

this usually means identities based on tribe, subtribe, or clan. Political competition in multiparty settings, by contrast, will create incentives for individuals to see themselves in terms of ethnic identities that define them as members of large blocks—usually based on religious, linguistic, or regional distinctions. The transition from one-party to multiparty political competition therefore has the potential to alter the identities that people embrace and, through this, the ethnic cleavages that come to matter in politics. The salience of ethnicity *per se* may not change—in fact, the argument presented in this article depends on the assumption that the desirability of supporting a member of one's own ethnic group is equally strong in both one-party and multiparty systems—but the salience of the particular dimension of ethnic cleavage that defines the political conflict can be transformed by the shift in regime type.

### **How Regime Change Can Affect the Ethnic Cleavages That Matter in Politics**

The explanation for why regime type can matter for the kinds of ethnic cleavages that become politically salient rests on three claims about the nature of African politics. The first is that African voters seek to maximize the amount of resources they can secure from the state. The resources in question include benefits such as jobs, development funds, agricultural subsidies, feeder roads, health clinics, relief food, and schools. The game of politics is understood to revolve around the transfer of these scarce but highly desired benefits by politicians in return for voters' political support (Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Ekeh, 1975; Jackson & Rosberg, 1982; Lindberg, 2003; van de Walle, 2001; Wantchekon, 2003; Young & Turner, 1985). Young and Turner (1985) summarize this clientelistic or (neo-) patrimonial system well in their description of the politics of (then) Zaire:

In the richly evocative Nigerian phrase, politics was “cutting the national cake.” The output of the state was perceived as divisible into slices of possibly unequal size, sweet to the taste, and intended to be eaten. A “they” category, in control of political institutions, would exploit its power to impose its dominion upon “we,” and to reserve for itself the lion's share of state resources. (p. 147)

What Young and Turner do not say—at any rate, not in this passage—is that, in the African context, “we” and “they” are frequently seen in ethnic

terms. This is because, in many African countries, voters assume that the likelihood that resources will be channeled to them—the likelihood that they will get to “eat”—is directly related to whether the politician who controls those resources is from their ethnic group (Barkan, 1979; Kanyinga, 1994; Posner, 2005). In such a setting, the competition for jobs, development resources, and other benefits becomes a struggle among ethnic communities to put one of their own into a position of political power. This is the second key claim about the nature of African politics: that voters seek access to state resources by allocating their electoral support to members of their own ethnic groups, who they assume will be more likely than noncoethnics to redistribute those resources to them. Meanwhile, candidates, recognizing this, couch their appeals in ethnic terms. Ethnicity thus assumes a position of prominence in election campaigns in Africa not because voters are atavistic or tradition-bound but because, in a context where the goal is to capture resources from the state, and where politicians woo supporters by promising to channel resources to them, ethnicity provides a cue that helps voters distinguish promises that are credible from promises that are not (Ferree, 2006).

The third claim about the nature of African politics is that it is fundamentally president-centered (Callaghy, 1984; Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Jackson & Rosberg, 1982; Manning, 2005). “Throughout the region,” van de Walle (2003) writes, “power is highly centralized around the president. He is literally above the law, controls in many cases a large proportion of state finance with little accountability, and delegates remarkably little of his authority on important matters” (p. 310). This strong presidentialism has a number of implications, the most important of which is that it downgrades the importance of legislative politics and centralizes the competition for national political power in multiparty elections.

## The Political Logic of Ethnic Multidimensionality

For the reasons described above, most African voters go to the polls with the goal of putting a member of their own ethnic group into office. However, the problem with the simple rule that one should “vote one’s group” is that both candidates and voters belong to many groups. This means that the question arises as to *which* group membership is relevant in deciding which candidate a voter should support. If a voter is a Muslim Yoruba from Ibadan, does she vote for her fellow Muslim, who may be Hausa? the fellow Yoruba, who may come from Oyo? or the fellow Ibadan resident, who may be a Christian? If the goal is to put someone from her own group in power, then any of these candidates would be preferable to a candidate who shares neither her

religious background nor her language group membership nor her home town origins. But given at least some shared group membership with all three, which would be best in terms of maximizing the resources that are likely to flow to her? For which candidate should she cast her vote?

The answer is that if her objective is to maximize her access to resources, she will do best by supporting the candidate who puts her in the winning coalition. Throwing her support behind a candidate from her own group will not do her any good if that candidate does not win, so a first criterion is whether the group is large enough relative to other groups to win.<sup>3</sup> So long as everyone else is also voting exclusively along group lines, this boils down to an issue of which of her group memberships puts her in the largest group vis-à-vis the other groups that are defined by that cleavage dimension.<sup>4</sup> But if more than one category of group membership would put her in a winning coalition, then she would prefer the one that puts her in the smaller of the two, because this way she will get to enjoy a larger share of the patronage that the coalition is able to control. For the same reason, if the population is homogeneous with respect to a particular line of cleavage (for example, if everyone is a Swahili-speaker or everyone is Basotho), then voting for a candidate based on shared membership in that group would not be advantageous, because such a coalition includes everyone in the polity and is, by definition, not minimum-winning.

Thus, a voter's optimal strategy is, first, to think about all the principles of ethnic division (that is, all the potentially mobilizable ethnic cleavages) that divide the political community—religion, language, region of origin, tribe, clan, and so on—and, for each of these, compare the relative sizes of her own group with the others that the cleavage defines. Thus, if the cleavage is "religion," she will need to compare the size of her own religious group (say, Muslims) with the sizes of all the other religious groups (say, Christians and Hindus) in the political arena. Then, she should select the principle of group division that puts her in the most advantageous group vis-à-vis the other groups and throw her support behind the candidate from that group.

Of course, in many cases, voters will lack the exact demographic information necessary to parse the relative sizes of all the groups on each cleavage dimension. In addition, in a context of anything other than straightforward single-member plurality (SMP) electoral rules, voters may have difficulty calculating which group memberships are optimal.<sup>5</sup> Personal relationships with particular candidates, independent knowledge about a candidate's ability to extract resources from the state, or the receipt of a bribe may also overshadow the rational ethnic coalition-building calculations I emphasize

here (though the first two factors are not likely to affect more than a relative handful of voters). Hence, the model I present will generate its strongest predictions about aggregate outcomes in situations where the groups in which voters can claim membership are not very close in size, where the institutional setting assigns seats to candidates that win a plurality (or majority) of the votes (as, for example, under SMP or single member majority electoral rules), and where bribery and election rigging are not major issues.<sup>6</sup>

### **Why One-Party and Multiparty Elections Give Rise to Different Salient Ethnic Cleavages**

How, then, does the one-party or multiparty nature of the political regime affect these calculations? It affects them by shifting the locus of political conflict from the local constituency level (in one-party contests) to the level of the country as a whole (in multiparty elections). This shift in the scope of the effective arena of political competition generates incentives for voters to identify themselves in terms of, and for politicians to emphasize, different dimensions of ethnic identity.<sup>7</sup> It thereby alters the kinds of cleavages around which political competition revolves.

The central institutional difference between one-party and multiparty regimes can be reduced to two key issues.<sup>8</sup> The first is whether multiple parties are legally permitted to compete for political power. In multiparty systems, where multiple parties are permitted, every parliamentary and presidential candidate runs on the ticket of a different party. In one-party systems, political competition takes place under the auspices of a single ruling party and every candidate must run on the ticket of that party. The second key difference lies in whether the executive is chosen by the electorate. In African one-party states, the norm is for the president to be chosen by the central committee of the ruling party and then ratified by voters through a simple up or down vote in the general election. In multiparty systems, multiple presidential candidates compete for support in the election itself. Thus, although presidential elections are held in both systems, voters only have a real choice among distinct alternatives for the presidency in multiparty contexts (Collier, 1982). These seemingly minor differences turn out to have important effects.

In multiparty elections, electoral competition takes place at two levels simultaneously: at the national level (for the presidency) and at the constituency level (for parliamentary representation). In practice, however, the effective arena of political competition for both the presidential and parliamentary contests is the national arena. This is because the party labels that parliamentary candidates bear identify them as representatives of national

coalitions, and this transforms the constituency-level contest into a national-level struggle. Party labels play this nationalizing role because of the highly presidential nature of African politics, which gives rise to a highly centralized party system. In the same way that the fusion of executive and legislative powers in the Cabinet in Victorian England following the first Reform Act of 1832 led to the centralization of the party system in that country (Cox, 1987), the consolidation of political power in the hands of African presidents causes African party systems to be nationally integrated.<sup>9</sup> African voters therefore view parties as representatives of national-scale coalitions and party labels as conveying information about national-level issues and orientations. In deciding which parliamentary candidates to support in multiparty elections, voters thus look beyond the candidates themselves and focus their attention on what their vote means for the battle among the political parties. And because political parties are competing for power at the national level (that is, for the presidency), the effective arena of political competition becomes the nation as a whole.

In one-party systems, by contrast, the outcome of the presidential election is determined in advance, so the only electoral contest of consequence is the one over who will represent each parliamentary constituency. The parliamentary election thus becomes the central locus of competition in the political system, and the effective arena of political conflict shrinks from the nation as a whole to the level of the local electoral constituency. This tendency is reinforced by the fact that party labels play no role in one-party parliamentary elections because they do not vary across candidates: In a single-party system, all candidates must, by law, run on the ticket of the single ruling party. The result is a focus on local cleavages and issues.<sup>10</sup>

Altering a country's political institutions to prohibit or allow for competition among multiple political parties therefore changes the boundaries of the effective arena of political competition, and this, in turn, can affect the kinds of ethnic cleavages that emerge as axes of political competition and conflict. Whereas political conflict will revolve around local constituency-level ethnic cleavages in one-party settings, it will revolve around broader cleavages that define national-scale groups when the arena of political competition expands to the entire country under multiparty rule. In most African countries, this means that one-party elections will revolve around tribal, subtribal, or clan differences (because these tend to divide electoral constituencies), whereas multiparty elections will revolve around regional, linguistic, or in some cases religious cleavages (because these tend to be national in scope). In both settings, politicians will seek to build minimum winning coalitions, and voters will cast their votes to secure membership in them.

And in both settings, politicians and voters alike will use ethnicity as an instrument to achieve these ends. But because the arenas of competition are different, the ethnic communities out of which these coalitions are crafted will be different as well.

The precise kinds of cleavages that will emerge as salient in one-party and multiparty settings will vary from country to country. At the constituency level, they will also vary from region to region within countries. For example, urban areas, with populations drawn from different regions, tend to give rise to different salient cleavages (often regionally based) than homogeneous rural areas (usually tribal or clan-based) (Mitchell, 1956; Young, 1976). Thus, whereas the common prediction in all cases is that local-level cleavages will structure political conflict in one-party elections while national-level cleavages will do so in multiparty contests, the specific kinds of local- and national-scale cleavages that play these roles will differ from country to country.

In addition, as I have stressed, not all electoral systems will be equally sensitive to changes in regime type. SMP systems with party-controlled ballots are the institutional setting in which the logic described above should be strongest (Carey & Shugart, 1995).<sup>11</sup> The cases of Zambia and Kenya—both former British colonies with SMP systems, a recent history of transition from competitive single-party to multiparty elections, and strict party control over ballot entry in the multiparty races—are thus particularly well suited for testing the predictions of the argument advanced in this article. For both countries, I first identify the ethnic cleavages that the argument would lead us to expect to see emerge as salient in one-party and multiparty contests. Then I compare ethnic voting patterns in the elections that took place on either side of the 1991 and 1992 regime transitions in each country to test whether they did. Given that the analysis rests on a sample of just two cases and that the argument itself depends on the presence of particular institutional rules and ethnic demographics (which happen to be present in Zambia and Kenya, but not in all African countries), the results can only be suggestive. They nonetheless provide confirmation for the linkage—even if just in a particular setting—between regime change and alterations in the kinds of ethnic cleavages that come to matter in politics.

## **Regime Change and Ethnic Cleavages in Zambia**

Zambia is a country where ethnicity matters. In both private businesses and in the public sector, hiring decisions and promotion prospects are

widely assumed to be linked to a person's ethnic background. From the president to the lowest-ranking civil servant, public officeholders are believed to use their power to assist members of their own ethnic communities (Posner 2005). This expectation has important implications for the way politics is conducted. It makes voters inclined to support politicians and parties from their own ethnic groups over others, and because politicians and parties know that voters will do this, it creates incentives for politicians and parties to couch their electoral appeals in ethnic terms.

The straightforward expectation that Zambian voters will vote their ethnic groups and that Zambian politicians and parties will play the ethnic card is complicated by the fact that Zambians see themselves ethnically in two quite different ways: as members of one of the country's roughly seventy tribes or as members of one of the country's four broad language communities. Seen through the lens of tribal divisions, Zambia's ethnic landscape is extremely diverse, divided into dozens of highly localized cultural communities scattered around the country. Seen in terms of the four language groups (into which the tribal groups nest)—Bemba-speakers, Nyanja-speakers, Tonga-speakers, and Lozi-speakers—it is much less fractionalized, partitioned into a much smaller number of large, regionally defined coalitions. So when Zambians follow the rule that they should vote for a member of their own ethnic group, which principle of group membership should they use to determine who is, and is not, a group member? And does this decision vary with regime type?

After a brief multiparty era following Zambia's independence in 1964, multiparty politics were suspended in 1972. The country then held four single-party elections—in 1973, 1978, 1983, and 1988—before a groundswell of political pressure forced the government to reintroduce multiparty politics in 1991 (Bratton, 1994). Since that date, Zambia has held three multiparty contests—in 1991, 1996, and 2001. All of these elections, both one-party and multiparty, featured multiple candidates competing for parliamentary seats in competitive races. The only significant differences among them were whether the candidates were running on the ticket of the same party (which they were in the one-party contests but not in the multiparty contests) and whether the president faced challengers (which he did in the multiparty elections but not in the one-party elections).

The argument advanced in this article generates a relatively simple expectation about which cleavage should have emerged as the axis of political competition in each regime context. During one-party elections, competition should have revolved around localized tribal divisions, whereas in multiparty elections, it should have revolved around national-scale linguistic divisions,

at least in rural constituencies.<sup>12</sup> There is no reason to expect voters to have voted more or less “ethnically” in either institutional context, because there is nothing about the one-party or multiparty nature of the elections that should have altered their expectations about the ethnic basis of patronage networks and thus the importance of “voting one’s group.” But their ethnic choices should have been guided by different yardsticks in each case: by the tribal backgrounds of the competing candidates in one-party elections and by the language-group orientations of the parties on whose tickets the candidates were running in multiparty elections.

Systematic evidence for this shift can be found by comparing voting patterns before and after the 1991 regime transition. If the argument advanced in this article is correct, then we should find the share of votes cast for candidates from a particular tribe in the pretransition (one-party) elections to be roughly equal to the share of voters in the constituency that are members of that tribe. In the posttransition (multiparty) elections, the match between the tribal demographics of the constituency and the candidates’ vote shares should be less good.<sup>13</sup> A better predictor of electoral success in multiparty contests should be the match between the presumed language-group orientation of the party with which the candidate is affiliated and the language group of the bulk of the population in the constituency.

To test these predictions, I collected information on the tribal backgrounds of every one of the more than 1,700 parliamentary candidates who ran for rural seats in the Zambian national assembly in the two elections that preceded the shift to multiparty rule (1983 and 1988) and the two elections that followed (1991 and 1996).<sup>14</sup> I also used data from Zambia’s 1990 census to calculate the tribal demographics of each of these electoral constituencies.<sup>15</sup> Taken together, these data make it possible to compare patterns of tribal voting across 203 electoral constituencies in four general elections.

I first test the argument by comparing the degree of tribal voting in the two one-party contests (1983 and 1988) and the two multiparty contests (1991 and 1996). I do this by comparing share of the dominant tribe in each constituency with the share of the vote won by parliamentary candidates belonging to that tribe—tribal voting being indicated by a correlation between the two.<sup>16</sup> Note that focusing only on the behavior of dominant tribe voters addresses only one implication of the argument: We would also expect members of the second most numerous tribe to vote for candidates from their group, members of the third most numerous tribe to vote for candidates from their group, and so on. Restricting the analysis to the behavior of members of the dominant tribe in each constituency greatly simplifies the analysis.

Although the argument leads us to expect to find greater tribal voting in one-party than multiparty elections, the expectation is *not* that we will find no evidence of tribal voting in multiparty contests. In multiparty elections, candidates who are supported because of their party affiliations but who happen to be members of the dominant tribe will look, in the data, like they were supported because of their tribal background. The bias will therefore be toward overestimating the degree of tribal voting in multiparty elections. Because this will make it more difficult to find a difference in the degree of tribal voting in one-party and multiparty settings, any difference I do find can be interpreted as fairly strong support for the predictions of the argument.

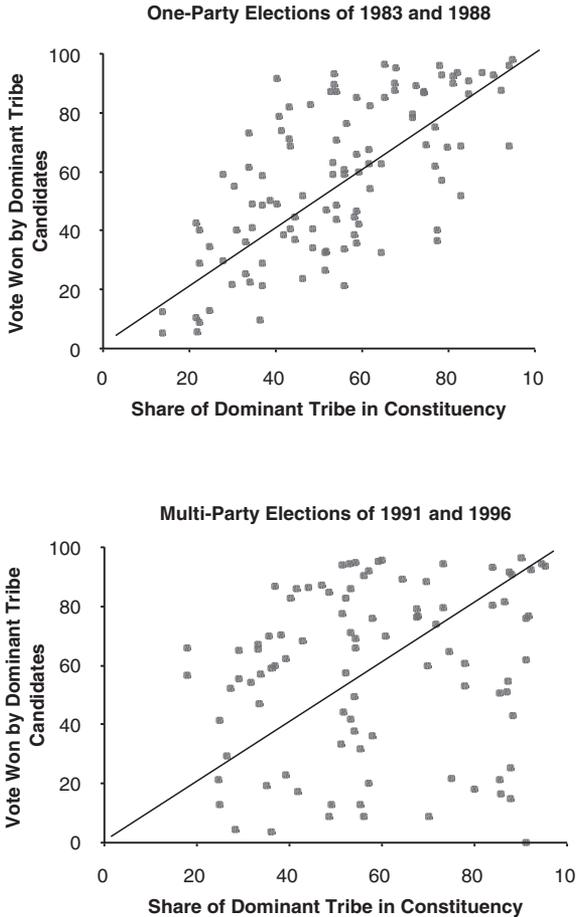
Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the share of votes won by dominant tribe candidates and the share of dominant tribe voters in each constituency in the one-party elections of 1983 and 1988 and the multiparty elections of 1991 and 1996. I exclude cases in which either all or none of the candidates in the race are from the dominant tribe in the constituency, because these contests provide no opportunity for dominant tribe voters to choose whether to vote for a candidate from their tribe and, thus, offer no test of the predictions of the argument. I draw the  $y = x$  line in the scatterplots for reference.

If the argument is right, we would expect the points in the one-party panel to be bunched closely about the  $y = x$  line and the points in the multiparty panel to be distributed more broadly. This is what we find. Yet the points in even the one-party scatterplot do not lie right along the  $y = x$  line. This suggests that factors other than the candidates' tribal backgrounds motivated voters' choices. For our purposes, however, the tightness of fit of the scatter around the  $y = x$  reference line is less important than the difference in that fit across the two panels, which does seem to be appreciably better in the one-party elections than in the multiparty ones. Indeed, the correlation between the dominant tribe's population share and its vote share is .67 for the one-party cases and .17 for the multiparty cases.

What about language group voting? Because language group voting is mediated by candidates' party labels, and because party labels only vary across candidates in multiparty races, it is not possible to compare patterns of language group voting in one-party and multiparty elections to test the expectation that it will be stronger in the latter than in the former. It is, however, possible to investigate whether voters in multiparty elections allocate their votes along language group lines and whether language group voting trumps tribal voting in such contests.

To test this expectation, I identified all parliamentary candidates who had run in the same constituency in both the final one-party election in

**Figure 1**  
**Tribal Voting in One-Party and Multiparty Elections in Zambia**



1988 and the first multiparty election in 1991.<sup>17</sup> Limiting the analysis to these candidates allows me to control for many of the factors that might have affected how the candidates performed, including their performance in the previous election. I then coded whether the party on whose ticket the candidate was running in the multiparty contest was affiliated with the dominant language group in the constituency. To do this, I asked whether

the president of the party on whose ticket the candidate was running was a member of the language group that dominated the constituency. If the answer was yes, then the candidate was coded as running on the ticket of the “right” party.<sup>18</sup> If the argument advanced in this article is right, we should expect this variable to be a powerful predictor of a candidate’s electoral performance.

An example will make the exercise more concrete. Consider a pair of otherwise identical candidates running for a seat in Bemba-speaking Northern Province in 1991: one running on the ticket of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD), the other on the ticket of the United National Independence Party (UNIP). If party labels convey information about language group orientations as I have suggested, then we would expect the candidate running on the MMD ticket to have won a larger share of the vote because the MMD was closely associated in voters’ minds with Northern Province Bemba-speakers (its president at the time, Fredrick Chiluba, was a Bemba-speaker). However, had the same candidates been running for a seat in Nyanja-speaking Eastern Province, we would have expected the UNIP candidate to have been advantaged, because UNIP was associated with Eastern Province Nyanja-speakers (its president at the time, Kenneth Kaunda, was seen as a Nyanja-speaker).

The results of the analysis bear out these expectations. The first column in Table 1 presents a simple regression of candidates’ vote share in 1991 on a dummy variable indicating whether the candidate was running on the ticket of the “right” party, as I have defined it above. The relationship is very strong, both statistically and substantively. The interpretation of the coefficient estimate in column 1 is that a candidate running on the ticket of the “right” party would expect to win a vote share fully *50 percentage points* higher than a candidate running on the ticket of the “wrong” party.

Those familiar with Zambia’s political transition election might object that the 1991 election was less an occasion for voters to parse the differences among candidates than a referendum on change. Indeed, as the vanguard party of change, the MMD won the support of fully 75% of voters. Yet even controlling for whether a candidate was running on the MMD ticket, as I do in column 2 of Table 1, the strong relationship between a candidate’s vote share and whether or not he or she was running on the ticket of a party associated with the dominant language group is sustained. A candidate running on the ticket of the “right” party is now estimated to have a 45 percentage point advantage over his or her opponent.

In column 3, I control for a number of other determinants of electoral success, including the number of candidates in the race (which has the

**Table 1**  
**Determinants of Success of Parliamentary Candidates in Zambia in 1991 (Dependent Variable: Candidate's Vote Share in 1991)**

	1	2	3
Constant	.261** (.027)	.202** (.021)	.186 (.202)
Candidate ran on ticket of "right" party in 1991	.501** (.057)	.454** (.043)	.439** (.045)
Candidate ran on Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) ticket		.337** (.044)	.352** .046
Number of candidates in 1991			-.019 (.080)
Candidate's vote share in 1988			.057 (.450)
Number of Candidates in 1991 × Candidate's Vote Share in 1988			-.005 (.182)
Number of candidates in 1988			-.009 (.014)
Candidate's Vote Share in 1988 × Number of Candidates in 1988			.029 (.036)
Candidate was a member of the dominant tribe in the constituency			.037 (.042)
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.52	.74	.77
<i>N</i>	72	72	72

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Analysis includes only candidates who ran in both 1988 and 1991 in the same constituencies.

\*\*Significantly different from zero at 99% confidence.

expected negative sign), the candidate's vote share in the previous election (which has the expected positive sign), and interactions between the number of candidates, both in 1988 and 1991, and the candidate's prior vote share.<sup>19</sup> None of these variables are statistically or substantively significant. I also include an indicator variable for whether the candidate was a member of the dominant tribe in the constituency—a variable that is hypothesized to be associated with electoral success in one-party but not multiparty elections. The small, insignificant coefficient on this variable confirms that tribal voting is not an important predictor of electoral success in multiparty elections, at least not when also controlling for whether the candidate was running on the ticket of the "right" party. In a regression (not shown) including all the controls from column 3 but omitting the "right party" variable, the "candidate was a member of the dominant tribe" variable becomes substantively and statistically significant (at  $p > .05$ ), with a coefficient of .149. So it would appear that voters in multiparty elections are more likely

to support their fellow tribesmen than candidates from other tribes, but that candidates' party labels (and the language group affiliations they convey) are a much more powerful determinant of voters' choices. Taken together, the findings suggest that the one-party or multiparty nature of the political system does indeed affect patterns of ethnic voting in the ways the argument developed in the article would lead us to expect.<sup>20</sup>

## **Regime Change and Ethnic Cleavages in Kenya**

Kenya, like Zambia, is a place where ethnicity matters. It is a place where people view their political representatives as sources of patronage (Barkan, 1979; Widner, 1992) and where they assume that having a member of their ethnic group in a position of political power will increase their access to state resources (Haugerud, 1995; Hyden & Leys, 1972). Writing about a visit to the country in 1993, Haugerud (1995) notes that "many Kenyans I talked with in both town and countryside . . . discussed the nation's political future in explicit ethnic and regional terms, and assumed that the ethnic identity of a new president would define patterns of favoritism" (p. 42). However, Kenya, like Zambia, is also a place where people understand their "ethnic group" in multiple ways. Thus, as in Zambia, the otherwise straightforward rule that a voter should support a member of his or her own ethnic group begs the question, Which group?

Kenyans view their country's ethnic landscape through different lenses in different settings. When they think about where they fit within the ethnic landscape of the country as a whole, Kenyans identify their "group" in terms of broad ethnic blocs defined by linguistic similarity, region of origin, or even religion. When they think of their "group" in more localized contexts, they do so in terms of their membership in one of the country's three dozen tribes or, in situations where the local context is tribally homogeneous, in terms of their membership in one of numerous subtribes or clans. As in Zambia, these local ethnic identities nest within the broader national-scale ones. Thus, whereas national level political competition is often understood in terms of the competition among the Kikuyu, Luo, Kalenjin, Luhya, and Coastal peoples (Mijikenda), each of these groups subsumes a number of smaller ethnic units that become relevant bases of social identity in more localized settings. For example, the broad Kikuyu bloc subsumes the Embu and Meru. It also contains distinctions between people from the northern and southern Kikuyu-speaking districts and among the several

Kikuyu clans (e.g., Kiambu, Gatundu, Muranga, Nyheri, etc.). The Kalenjin are a linguistic umbrella category linking members of the Nandi, Kipsigis, Tugen, Pokot, Elgeyo, Keiyo, Marakwet, Seibi, Dorobo, Terik, and Sabaot tribes; and sometimes also the Maasai, Turkana, and Samburu. For this reason, the broader Kalenjin coalition is commonly referred to in the Kenyan press via the acronym KAMATUSA (for the Kalenjin, Maasai, Turkana, Samburu). The Luhya subsume 16 different smaller tribal groups. The Luo contain dozens of clan divisions. And the Mijikenda contain within their ranks members of the distinct Giriama, Digo, Rabai, Chonyi, Kauma, Ribe, Duruma, and Jibana tribes.

Unlike Zambia, where the relevant axes of ethnic cleavage at the local and national levels are uniform (tribe in the former, language in the latter), the principles of group identification that Kenyans use to categorize themselves at the local and national levels tend to vary from one part of the country to another. For the Mijikenda, whose national-level self-identification is regional or even religious—they are the (predominantly Muslim) people of the coast—local level distinctions are made in terms of tribal affiliations. For the Luo, the national-level principle of ethnic identification is tribal (which works for them because they are a fairly large tribal group), whereas local-level distinctions are based on clan affiliations. Yet irrespective of the different principles of group membership that each community employs at each level, the important point is that Kenyans have clearly distinct local- and national-scale ethnic identities. This makes it possible to inquire whether, as in Zambia, the shift from one-party to multiparty rule in 1992 caused political actors to alter the ethnic cleavages that they viewed as salient: from local-level social divisions during the first period to national-level divisions during the second.

Kenya held competitive single-party elections in 1969, 1974, 1979, 1983, and 1988.<sup>21</sup> As in Zambia, the only significant institutional difference between these elections and the multiparty ones that have followed was whether candidates were running on the ticket of the same party and whether the president faced challengers. Accounts of Kenya's one-party electoral contests suggest that competition revolved centrally around locally defined ethnic communities.

Hyden and Leys (1972) observe that the structure of Kenya's one-party elections "put a premium on clan- and tribe-based politics" (p. 397). Writing about the 1969 single-party contest, they note,

When we examine the evidence from individual constituencies it is clear that clan and locality cleavages were of fundamental importance. All the

constituency reports without exception emphasized the priority accorded by voters to the candidates' tribes (in urban areas) and clans (in rural seats). . . . The candidates' electoral arithmetic . . . began and largely ended with calculations of tribal and clan support. (p. 401).

With the shift to multiparty competition in 1992, however, the relevant lines of ethnic cleavage changed. In the new institutional setting, the politicians' local ethnic backgrounds were trumped by the regional ethnic orientations suggested by their party affiliations. Throup and Hornsby (1998) describe the change:

In previous elections, in the one-party state, the main electoral factors had been clanism and localism. . . . Many observers and candidates expected that the 1992 general election would be fought on the same basis. . . . This was not to be. . . . In the end . . . regional and ethnic blocs were to prove the key to the outcome. (p. 339)

The return to multiparty competition did nothing to change Kenyans' assumptions about whether patronage distribution would follow ethnic lines: They continued to assume that it would. Nor did it alter their beliefs that they needed to support candidates from their own groups. But it completely changed the criteria they used to determine which candidates were, or were not, fellow group members. Whereas local identities had defined group membership and served as axes of electoral competition in the one-party era, national-level identities and cleavages assumed these roles in the new multiparty setting. As Throup and Honsby summarize, "Neo-patrimonialism shifted from the micro- to the macro-level" (p. 589).

This shift in the relevant basis of political competition was reflected in the extremely high geographic concentration of the vote in the 1992 election (and also in the one that followed in 1997). Whereas one-party elections had tended to be fairly close contests, a large number of the 1992 (and 1997) races were won in landslides. Indeed, so strongly did parties draw on their regional bases in these contests, that Barkan and Ng'ethe (1998) describe them as distinct sets of geographically distinct one-party-dominant elections. In both elections, roughly 90% of voters from the Kikuyu-dominated districts of Central Province and the southeastern part of the Rift Valley supported candidates from the two Kikuyu-led political parties, the Democratic Party (DP) and the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy–Asili (FORD-Asili). Kenya African National Union (KANU) candidates won roughly 90% of the vote in the Kalenjin home districts. And an equally high

share of voters in Luo-dominated constituencies supported Oginga Odinga's Forum for the Restoration of Democracy-Kenya (FORD-Kenya) in 1992 and his son Raila's National Development Party (NDP) in 1997. This highly regional pattern of voting marked a sharp departure from the much more closely fought elections of the one-party era.

Because Kenya's electoral constituencies were drawn so that their boundaries would be congruent with the boundaries of tribal areas, it is almost never the case that candidates from nondominant tribes ever entered election races, except in urban constituencies. It is therefore, unfortunately, not possible to analyze patterns of tribal voting across one-party and multiparty elections, as we did for Zambia in Figure 1. It is, however, possible to test whether voters in Kenya's 1992 multiparty election supported candidates running on the tickets of parties associated with the ethnoregional groups that dominated their constituencies—an analysis that parallels the one summarized in Table 1.

As in the Zambia analysis, an example will help clarify the exercise. This time, however, the example is not just hypothetical. In 1997, Uhuru Kenyatta ran for Parliament in on the KANU ticket in Gatundu South in Kiambu district. Kenyatta had impeccable credentials as a true Kikuyu: He was the son of Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president and the senior Kikuyu patriarch in the country's history. Gatundu South was a Kikuyu stronghold. So, based on the match between Kenyatta's own tribal background and that of the vast majority of the constituency's voters, he should have had a great advantage. But this was a multiparty election, and voters attached more emphasis to his party label than to his individual characteristics. Unfortunately for Kenyatta, his party label—KANU—identified him with the old Kalenjin-dominated regime and caused voters to view him as working against the interests of the Kikuyu. The result was that he was soundly defeated by an opposition neophyte running on the DP ticket. Had he been running on the DP ticket, he almost certainly would have won the seat.<sup>22</sup>

To test for the impact of party labels more systematically, I proceeded exactly as I did in the Zambia analysis described above. First I identified all parliamentary candidates that had run in the same constituencies against at least one other candidate in both the 1988 one-party election and the 1992 multiparty election. Then I created a "right party" variable by coding whether the party on whose ticket the candidate was running in 1992 was affiliated with the dominant ethnoregional group in the constituency.<sup>23</sup> Table 2 presents the results of the analysis.

**Table 2**  
**Determinants of Success of Parliamentary Candidates in Kenya in 1992 (Dependent Variable: Candidate's Vote Share in 1992)**

	1	2	3
Constant	.186** (.023)	.201** (.028)	.188 (.447)
Candidate ran on ticket of "right" party in 1992	.448** (.032)	.455** (.033)	.453** (.034)
Candidate ran on Kenya African National Union (KANU) ticket		-.033 (.034)	-.086* (.037)
Incumbent in 1992			-.028 (.056)
Number of candidates in 1992			-.074 (.067)
Number of Candidates in 1992 × Candidate Vote Share in 1988			.074 (.141)
Candidate vote share in 1988			.158 (.913)
Number of candidates in 1988			.048 (.151)
Candidate Vote Share in 1988 × Number of Candidates in 1988			.031 (.316)
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.61	.61	.64
<i>N</i>	126	126	126

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. Analysis only includes candidates that ran in both 1988 and 1992 in the same constituencies.

\*Significantly different from zero at 95% confidence. \*\*Significantly different from zero at 99% confidence.

As in the Zambia analysis, I begin in column 1 with a simple regression of candidates' vote share in 1992 on a dummy variable indicating whether the candidate was running on the ticket of the "right" party. The relationship is extremely strong, statistically and substantively. The interpretation of the coefficient in column 1 is that a candidate running on the ticket of the "right" party for that particular constituency would expect to outperform his rivals by 45 percentage points.

In column 2, I add a variable to control for whether the candidate was running on the KANU ticket. In the Zambia analysis, controlling for whether the candidate was running on the MMD ticket was necessary because the MMD label identified candidates as agents of political change—something that almost all Zambian voters supported in 1991. The KANU label had no such association in Kenya in 1992; indeed, the opposite was probably true. I include it, instead, to control for the possibility that KANU candidates were advantaged by their ability to draw on state resources in the campaign.<sup>24</sup> The small, insignificant (and negative) coefficient on the KANU variable suggests that this channel of influence on electoral support, although

plausible, was much less important than running on the ticket of the party associated with the dominant ethnic group in the area. The inclusion of additional controls in column 3 (for whether the candidate was an incumbent, the number of candidates running in the contest, the candidate's vote share in the prior election, the number of candidates in that election, and interactions between the number of candidates in 1992 and 1988 and the candidate's prior vote share) does little to alter the core finding that running on the ticket of the party that voters identify with the interests of their broad ethnoregional group was a powerful predictor of a candidate's success. This is exactly what we would expect to find if voters allocated their electoral support in the way the argument developed in the article predicts they should.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

The wave of political liberalization that swept across Africa in the early 1990s was accompanied by a wave of scholarship on its effects.<sup>26</sup> A number of authors speculated on the impact that the shift from one-party to multiparty rule would have on ethnic conflict in the region. Some argued that the introduction of competitive multiparty elections would set ethnic groups against each other and cause communal strife to intensify. Others suggested that the civil liberties and protections commonly provided by liberal regimes would cause ethnic conflicts to diminish. Whatever the anticipated outcome, however, the focus of attention was on the effect that regime change would have on the intensity of the conflict between ethnic communities. No attention was paid to the possibility that the (re-)introduction of competitive multiparty elections might have an effect on the *kinds* of groups in whose name the conflict was being carried out.

The goal of this article has been to show that, quite apart from the effect that regime change in Africa may have had on the intensity of ethnic conflict (a worthy topic that I do not treat here), it also had a critical (and heretofore overlooked) impact on the kinds of ethnic cleavages around which that conflict was structured. This article illustrates the point with data from Zambia and Kenya. In the pretransition eras in these countries, electoral competition revolved around local-level ethnic cleavages: tribe in Zambia and a combination of tribe, subtribe, and clan divisions in Kenya. But following the shift to multiparty rule, electoral conflict came to revolve around broader, national-scale ethnic cleavages: language groups in Zambia and broader ethnoregional divisions in Kenya. Politicians played the ethnic card and voters endeavored to put members of their own ethnic groups into

positions of political power in both settings—so it is not that the salience of ethnicity per se was altered by the change in regime type. But the particular ethnic card that politicians played and the particular rules that voters applied to determine who was a member of their ethnic group differed in each context. The shift from one-party to multiparty rules transformed the kinds of ethnic cleavages that mattered in politics.

The argument this article advances for how regime change affects the salience of alternative ethnic cleavages hinges on an instrumentalist view of ethnicity in which individuals “vote their ethnic groups” to maximize their access to resources. Although still controversial in some circles, such a perspective is hardly new in African studies or in the study of ethnic politics more broadly. What is new in this article is the application of this framework to the question of why individuals choose some identities over others. As I show, it is the strategic choice of local-scale identities over national-scale identities in one-party elections, and of national-scale identities over local ones in multiparty contests, that accounts for the effects of regime change on the salience of different kinds of ethnic cleavages.

## Notes

1. Because I focus on the impact of transitions from one-party to multiparty political competition, I only treat countries that previously held reasonably competitive single-party elections and now hold reasonably competitive multiparty contests (or have held at least one such election since 1989). This is a more limited understanding of regime change than is found in much of the literature, as it excludes transitions from regimes in which elections were never held, such as military regimes and settler oligarchies.

2. All of these identities are “ethnic,” in the broad sense that they all designate communities whose members are assumed to be related by descent (see Fearon & Laitin, 2000). Here, and throughout the article, I use the term *tribe* to refer to an ethnic community that is (or was historically) organized under the authority of a traditional chief. Membership in a tribe is determined by the answer to the question, “Are you (or were your parents) subjects of Chief X?”

3. The argument assumes a single member plurality or majoritarian system. The logic becomes less clear, and the predictions of the argument weaker, under conditions of proportional representation (PR). In a PR system, given a low enough threshold, the criterion of winnability may apply to multiple groups.

4. Regarding the presumption that everyone else is voting along ethnic group lines, Horowitz (1985) stresses that even voters who might be inclined not to vote ethnically often do so because they assume that voters from other groups will do so: “The incentives toward reactive ethnic voting are strong. When voters of one group choose . . . to give their vote predictably on an ethnic basis to an ethnically defined party, they put voters of the other group who do choose among parties at a collective disadvantage. All else being equal, such voters will seek to reduce their disadvantage by concentrating their votes in a comparable ethnic party. In such a situation, ethnic voters tend to drive out non-ethnic votes” (p. 323).

5. Note, however, that even where voters have only hazy understandings of relative group sizes, or of how new electoral institutions will aggregate their votes, vote-seeking politicians and parties—especially those that can claim to represent the minimum-winning group—will go out of their way to explain to voters why a vote for them is in the voters' best interest. So a voter's job may be less to deduce from scratch which strategy is optimal than the much simpler task of weighing the different logics presented by the competing candidates and parties.

6. The stipulation that ethnic coalitions not be close in size may also be important for a second reason. The literature on oversized parliamentary coalitions (e.g., Groseclose & Snyder, 1996) suggests that voters may find it advantageous to choose memberships in coalitions that are larger than minimum-winning. Although the logic of parliamentary coalitions (where defections are a constant threat) is somewhat different from the logic of voting coalitions (where defection is only meaningful at election time), the general message of this literature may nonetheless be relevant. The implication would be, once again, that the clear decision rule I ascribe to voters will hold best when voters are choosing between two potential coalitions where the larger of the two is more than just marginally larger than minimum-winning.

7. Political parties are also strategic actors in the story, at least in multiparty elections. They must decide which candidates to run and what issues or ethnic affiliations to stress during the campaign. I do not discuss these decisions explicitly because I assume that they follow the same logic as that ascribed to the politicians/candidates.

8. One-party and multiparty regimes often differ on other dimensions as well—for example, in the freedom they provide for civil society groups and the press, the opportunities they offer for incumbent legislators to be displaced by challengers, and the degree of governmental control they require over campaigning practices and electoral appeals. However, it would be difficult to link variation on these dimensions to variation in the kinds of ethnic cleavages that emerge as salient in one-party and multiparty settings.

9. Scheiner's (2005) work on Japan provides a parallel argument about how the centralization of political power in a patronage-oriented system causes politics—even local politics—to become nationalized.

10. The argument about the localization of cleavages under one-party politics owes inspiration to V. O. Key (1949). Bates (1989, p. 92) provides a slightly different argument that leads to the same result. He argues that national issues, and the national frame, will be salient in multiparty elections because voters will view candidates as potential members of coalitions that might conceivably form the government and shape national policy. In single-party elections, however, voters know that each candidate will have only a negligible impact on national policy, because even if they are successful, they will only be a single member of Parliament. This calculation, Bates argues, shifts voters' attention from national policy issues (in multiparty contests) to patronage concerns (in single-party contests). Thus, national issues and cleavages will animate multiparty politics and local-level rivalries will structure one-party politics. Although deductively sound, there are two problems with applying this argument to most African countries. First, it overestimates the extent to which voters ever view candidates as shapers of national policy agendas. Politics in contemporary Africa is so president-centered that legislatures play very little role in shaping policy, and voters know this. Indeed, Wantchekon's (2003) findings show clearly that policy considerations are of only minor concern to African voters. Second, Bates's account underestimates the role of patronage concerns in competitive party settings. Targetable benefits—be they individualized benefits such as money or jobs or local public goods such as roads or clinics—play a central role in both one-party and multiparty elections in Africa (though in the latter case, they are used both for individual vote buying and for organization building). The account provided here reaches the same

conclusions as Bates does without making assumptions about either the extent to which voters see candidates as policy makers or the relative salience of patronage in one-party and multiparty regimes.

11. Although Carey and Shugart's (1995) analysis deals only with multiparty systems, one of the systems they discuss (single nontransferable vote [SNTV] with open endorsements and district magnitude = 1) exactly captures the one-party single-member plurality system described in this article. This is the system in which, according to their typology, candidates' personal reputations are most important.

12. Urban constituencies should reflect a different pattern. High rates of in-migration to Zambia's urban areas during the colonial era transformed urban districts into demographic microcosms of the country as a whole. Thus, the structure of national- and constituency-level cleavages in urban areas of Zambia are nearly identical, and we would expect the shift from one-party to multiparty rule to generate no change in the kinds of identities that emerge as salient. Because 80% of Zambia's electoral constituencies are located in rural areas, the rural outcome can reasonably be taken to be the outcome writ large. Nonetheless, in the analyses that follow, I limit my treatment to rural constituencies only.

13. Of course, such an analysis is only possible if constituencies are ethnically heterogeneous, which they are in Zambia (but, unfortunately, are not in Kenya).

14. I did this by compiling a list for each of the country's 57 administrative districts of every candidate who ran for Parliament in that district in these elections. I then independently asked at least two long-time residents of each district to help me identify the tribal backgrounds of the candidates on my list based on the candidates' names. In cases where my informants disagreed on the ethnic background of a candidate, I consulted at least two additional people from that district. For a fuller discussion of these procedures, see Posner (2005, Appendix C).

15. Zambia's 1990 census included the question, "What is your Zambian tribe?" By building up electoral constituencies from local census units, I was able to calculate the exact tribal demographics of every constituency. For details, see Posner (2005, Appendix D).

16. There are well-known dangers in making inferences about individual-level behavior (such as voting decisions) from aggregate data. But as long as there is no reason to believe that the potential bias from the ecological inference problem is greater in one-party than multiparty elections, this should not present a major difficulty for the analysis I am undertaking here.

17. I exclude candidates that ran unopposed in either the one-party or the multiparty contest.

18. Dominant language groups were identified from constituency-level 1990 census figures. Mambwe- and Namwanga-speakers were included in the Bemba-speaking group, and Tumbuka-speakers were included in the Nyanja-speaking group. I coded the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) as a "Bemba" party because its president in 1991 was from the Bemba language group. I coded the United National Independence Party (UNIP) as a "Nyanja" party because its president at the time was popularly viewed as a Nyanja speaker. MMD candidates were coded as running on the ticket of the "right" party when they were running in constituencies in the Bemba-speaking Northern Province, Copperbelt Province, and Luapula Province; UNIP candidates were coded as running on the ticket of the "right" party when they were running in constituencies in Nyanja-speaking Eastern Province. I excluded from the analysis candidates that ran as independents (of which there were eight) and candidates where the match between their party label and the dominant language group in the constituency was ambiguous (of which there were, again, eight).

19. All of the candidates were incumbents; hence the absence of a control for incumbency.

20. Note that whereas the analysis permits claims to be made about the relative salience of national-scale and local cleavages in multiparty contests, I do not have a measure of the salience of national-level cleavages during one-party elections and thus cannot make claims about the impact of regime change on the *absolute* importance attached to national-level cleavages.

21. The 1969, 1974, and 1979 contests were just de facto one-party contests, as a one-party state was not formally declared until 1982.

22. In a 2002 interview (Quist-Arceton, 2002), Kenyatta confirmed this interpretation. Asked why he lost the 1997 parliamentary election even though he was running in a heavily Kikuyu district, Kenyatta replied that "my problem was that I was in the wrong party. I was in KANU. . . . The main push then was 'join DP, join any other party and we will vote for you.' . . . People were voting largely on the basis of ethnicity and it depended on which party you were in and, as far as they were concerned, [the DP] was the party that they wanted the Kikuyu community to be in and that was it."

23. I coded parties' home areas as follows: Democratic Party of Kenya (DP; Central and Eastern Provinces); Forum for the Restoration of Democracy-Asili (FORD-Asili; Central Province and Nairobi); Forum for the Restoration of Democracy-Kenya (FORD-K; Nyanza Province); Kenya African National Union (KANU; Northeastern, Coast, Rift Valley, Western Provinces, and parts of Eastern Province). I am indebted to the late Judy Geist for her generous help with this coding effort. Where the match between a candidate's party label and the dominant language group in the constituency was ambiguous, I dropped them from the analysis. There were nine such cases.

24. Only two parties competed in the 1991 election in Zambia (MMD and UNIP, the incumbent), so the "ran on MMD ticket" dummy variable in the Zambia regression also picks up the effect of running on a UNIP ticket (and with it, any advantage that UNIP candidates may have obtained from their party's control of the state apparatus).

25. Note that, unlike in the Zambia analysis, it is impossible to compare the relative salience of local- and national-scale ethnic attachments in Kenya's multiparty races. This is because, as noted, all Kenyan candidates are members of the dominant tribal groups in their areas, which makes it impossible to test for the impact of this factor on election results. Also, as in the Zambia analysis, I do not have a direct measure of the strength of national-level cleavages in one-party elections and thus cannot make claims about changes in the absolute salience of national-level cleavages.

26. For a good summary, see Gibson (2002).

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